

Nevada State Technical Advisory Committee

Spring Meeting, June 15, 2011 (revised)

The Nevada State Technical Committee meeting was held by videoconference from the Nevada Farm Bureau office in Sparks, Nev. Remote locations participating were Battle Mountain, Caliente, Carson City, Elko, Ely, Fallon, Las Vegas, Winnemucca, and Yerington. The meeting started at 9:00 am and ended at 1:00 pm.

Participants

Partners: Doug Busselman, Nevada Farm Bureau; Brian Thomas, Indian Nations Conservation Alliance; Stephanie Wilson, US Environmental Protection Agency; Susan Abele, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Suzette Claypool, Dan Allen and Matt Spaulding, Bureau of Indian Affairs; Clint Koble, Farm Service Agency (FSA); Shawn Espinosa, Nevada Dept. of Wildlife (NDOW); Matt Tuma, Senator Reid's Office; John Christopherson, Nevada Division of Forestry; John McLain, Resource Concepts, Inc.; Birgit Widegren, Nevada Division of Environmental Protection; Kelly Clark, USDA Rural Development; Dan Nelson, University of Nevada Cooperative Extension (UNCE); Connie Lee, NDOW; Michelle Langsdorf, Mason/Smith Conservation Districts (CD); Carl Clinger, Big Meadow CD; Katie Nuffer, FSA; Joe Sicking, Nevada Conservation Commission; Jerry Annis, Lander County Conservation District; Rodney Davis, UNCE; Jessi Eckert, Lahontan/Stillwater CDs.

NRCS: Bruce Petersen, Gary Roeder, Susan Looper, Paulette Balliette, Mike Odegard, Albert Mulder, Kristen Cuevas, Thad Heater, Bill Elder, Levi Steptoe, Liz Warner, Ed Biggs, Tracey Jean Wolfe, Cory Lytle, Jim Gifford, Jessica Esenarro, Jim Gatzke, Craig Plummer, Leah Mori, Debra Brackley, Karl Anderson, Allen Moody, Christie Scilacci, Jaime Jasmine, Kory Kulinsky, Brian Taylor, and Jarrod Edmunds.

Partner Updates

Bruce announced the new shared NDOW – NRCS position that has been developed.

Joe Sicking commented about the new legislation that had resulted in the funding cuts affecting the Nevada Conservation Districts (CD), and thanked Bruce and the NRCS for the on-going support of the agency. Joe stated the CD received over \$170,000 in funding, but each District was being awarded only \$2,500 from the State of Nevada. Out of that \$2,500, each District must provide liability and tort claim insurance which cost about \$1,500. Basically, the CD's only have about \$1,000 for operating expenses.

Review Minutes of the November 17, 2010 STAC Meeting

Bruce asked everyone to review the last State Technical Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes from last November.

Mid-year Review of Conservation Progress

Bruce highlighted some of the agency program matters that had taken place since last fall, including:

- **Program allocations and fund obligation:** The next Farm Bill is being written and developed as we speak. There is a need to discuss and develop new Ranking criteria for 2012 program sign-ups now.
 - EQIP, WHIP, AMA, and Sage-Grouse Initiative: There were a total of 342 applications submitted this year, amounting to \$16 million; 108 applications were funded, totaling \$9.3 million.
 - Organics: Bruce reported that Nevada NRCS allocated approximately \$400,000 for Organic EQIP, and even though the EQIP Organic program was greatly promoted, there were no eligible applications, and the funds were sent back to National Headquarters (NHQ).

- **Current FY 2012 Legislative Discussion affecting Conservation:** FY 2011 Final Budget approved by the President effectively eliminated the USDA Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) program. There were three RC&D areas in Nevada affected by this budgetary action. We do not know what will happen to the coordinators at this time.

NRCS Resource Assessments

Bill Elder said that, in March, Nevada NRCS was requested by NHQ to identify areas with resources of concern statewide. This information was aggregated and broken down by hydrologic unit code (HUC) throughout the state. The information will be used to identify site specific resource concerns from 2007 to present day, with consideration to 1) what conservation practices and projects have been completed, and 2) the location of the practices or projects in the HUC, and 3) if the conservation treatment applied was effective.

The aggregated data is being called a State Resource Assessment, and is an agency wide coordinated effort to prepare for projected legislative sessions that may require reporting by the agency. This information may be used to consider types of funding pools and field office staffing, and will help the agency “validate” the conservation work that has been completed, and the continuing need for work being done in the field.

Bill commented further that the initial data collected had been used to generate maps for each resource concern identified. Bill stated that even though there may be only one site identified per resource concern per HUC, the resource concern was representative of the entire HUC. Bill provided a series of 10 maps that identified the following resource concerns throughout the State of Nevada, including:

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| • Air Quality – Particulate Matter | • Organic Matter Depletion |
| • Inadequate Habitat for Wildlife | • Plant Productivity and Health |
| • Inefficient Energy Use | • Sheet and Rill Erosion |
| • Inefficient Moisture Management | • Water Quality Degradation – Nutrients |
| • Inefficient Use of Irrigation Water | • Wind Erosion |

There was a lot of interest from BLM and NDOW about being able to contribute data to this resource assessment. A primary interest from the partners present regarded the magnitude of each resource concern identified in an area, which prompted the following questions:

- How does the interface take place between the landowner and NRCS in order to access this information?
 - **Bill:** Many different ways. Resource concerns can be identified by the landowner, agency or Technical Committee.
- How or why is the entire HUC identified as a problem if only one resource concern incident has been identified?
 - **Bill:** We are identifying the whole HUC at this point in order to continue collecting information and figure out the magnitude of the concern.
- BLM is interested in being able to contribute to this data base for the resource assessment of the state because the BLM has been engaged in a similar assessment on Public Lands.
 - **Bill and Mike Odegard** felt that if public lands were included in this report that the assessment would look a lot different when mapped, and that this kind of data collection was specific to private lands verses public lands. The mapping would look a lot different with the public allotments included, and there was the challenge of distribution of the aggregated information because of privacy statutes. There was some discussion about FOIA requests for such information by other groups and how that information would be used in the future.

ACTION: Bill stated there would be a follow-up about this assessment.

Integrated Pest Management and Herbaceous Weed Control

Mike Odegard discussed the NRCS Pest Management Standard and how it has been developed at a national level. Mike stated that while an NRCS Standard can be adjusted to a degree to meet specific needs of a State, the Standard must not be compromised. Mike discussed the new Integrated Pest Management (IPM 595) Standard and how it is different from the old Pest Management (595) Standard. Mike reiterated that federal dollars could not be used for the primary benefit of crop production. Mike discussed the difference between crop production concerns about weed and bug pests; and the growing concern over noxious and invasive weed species in Nevada and their impact on rangeland and other ecosystem communities.

NOTE: New Web pages and fact sheets on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Herbaceous Weed Control (HWC) have recently been developed and are posted on the Nevada NRCS Web site: <http://www.nv.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>.

Albert Mulder discussed some of the particulars between the old and new Pest Management (595) NRCS Standard. Basically, the new IPM (595) Standard will address herbaceous, noxious and invasive weed control by focusing on monitoring, materials applied (timing and rate), spot spraying and crop rotations.

ACTION: A producer asked if pesticide resistant plants could be addressed in the standard.

ACTION: **Mike** stated he'd like to organize a subcommittee to address the growing concerns over weed management in the state.

Topics for Discussion and Input for Local Workgroups

Gary Roeder reviewed the guidance provided to the DC's from the State Conservationist concerning topics for discussion at local workgroup meetings, regarding possible fund pools through the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (Farm Bill Programs), and related program recommendations:

- Replacement of old irrigation systems – Can energy inefficiencies be addressed through on-farm energy audits?
- Control of noxious/invasive weeds – What is the most appropriate role for the NRCS to coordinate efforts with the local workgroups?
- Riparian Areas/Stream Bank Corridors – Is water erosion a priority? What about wind erosion concerns when converting irrigated land to non-irrigated land for native range ground.
- Farm & Rangeland Protection Program (FRPP) – What about the issue of the lack of matching funds for FRPP projects? This year, NRCS had to return \$3 million dollars to NHQ because there were no projects that could provide the matching funds required for program participation. Do we need a stronger grassroots effort for these programs?
- Is there a need to do more collaborative work on public lands? Should there be fund pools for the different kind of priorities between public and private lands? Gary asked if there were any old concerns that need resolve.

ACTION: Gary mentioned that agencies represented on the STAC and all local work groups are welcome to comment on these topics by August 30th. Cory Lytle felt that was too soon to get a response from the local work groups since they don't usually meet until fall. Connie from Elko wanted to know what she could do to collect that kind of input. It was mentioned that input for development of FY 2012 programs needs to occur by that date to effectively finalize program decisions for the coming fiscal year needs to occur prior to October 1.

There was a comment that the timing of comments from the local workgroups are a little tight given that we want input by Oct. 1 and some workgroups don't meet until late summer.

USDA Settlement Cases

Bruce discussed the 4 USDA lawsuits currently being settled, and asked the committee for their help in getting the word out to potentially affected groups: Native Americans, Hispanics, Women and Black farmers and ranchers. **Nevada FSA Director Clint Koble** reiterated that the settlements are a priority for USDA, and that he genuinely wants to address the issue of program disparity within FSA.

Settlement Information:

Woman & Hispanic Farmers/Ranchers	1-888-508-4429	www.farmerclaims.gov
Native American Farmers/Ranchers	1-888-233-5506	www.IndianFarmClass.com
Black Farmers/Ranchers	1-877-810-8110	www.blackfarmercase.com

Information is also posted on the Nevada NRCS home page: www.nv.nrcs.usda.gov.

Open Discussion:

- **Sean Espinoza, NDOW**, inquired about the possibility of matching funds for easement projects where monitoring vegetation and wildlife were critical for project success.
ACTION: **Bruce** will explore the possibility of using Sage-Grouse Initiative funds as a cost share component for monitoring.
- **Mike Odegard** said ‘no’ in response to a question as to whether or not NRI funding or data could be used for field monitoring.
- **Connie Lee** felt that there needed to be greater collaboration for obtaining matching funds for easement projects. **Gary Roeder informed** Connie about a letter that was sent out by Bruce earlier this spring to inform them of the match opportunities that NRCS presents through the FRPP. These letters were sent to entities inside and outside of Nevada seeking interest in utilizing the FRPP matching funds.
- **Kelly Clark** expressed the need for post monitoring for the Pinyon–Juniper Partnership Project.
ACTION: **Mike Odegard** reminded folks that monitoring is an essential element in the NRCS Standard, but that he would look into “monitoring” as a “stand-alone” practice. There was interest in creating an agreement between the NRCS and other agencies for project monitoring funds. The challenge of a multi-agency monitoring agreement would be the fact that NRCS Standards would still have to apply to any of the work completed.
- **Clint Koble** distributed a report on [FSA activities](#) in Nevada.

Fencing Policy on Tribal Lands

Bruce discussed the possibility of funding opportunities for fencing on Tribal Lands with respect to exterior perimeter boundary fences. Bruce looked to BIA for input on this subject and whether or not the BIA would be interested. Suzette Claypool stated there would interest in building exterior perimeter fences for livestock grazing, however, they would require a legal survey. Suzette stated that BIA would like to be a part of the process because they must verify that boundary fences are legal markers before they are installed. **Bruce** acknowledged that funding for such projects would be limited because of the cost, and it wouldn’t be fair to ignore the other priorities in the state. **Gary Roeder** asked how we would rank or prioritize fencing projects. There was consensus that funding for exterior boundary fencing on the Reservations would be supported, but Bruce wants to continue honing the idea before funding commitments are allocated. A possible component of the fencing could include a prescribed grazing plan or range seeding.

ACTION: Involve BIA in developing Tribal fencing policy process.

Matt BIA asked about fencing Indian lands that are not part of a reservation. Does NRCS do boundary fences off the reservation?

ACTION: The state technical committee asked that they be kept informed on the development of tribal fencing policy.

Written comments: For wildlife control we should cost-share on fencing, Applicant must have lease or assignment for more than 5 years to be eligible for cost-share assistance, Fencing out of river, ponds, springs, etc should be a priority, No cost-share on new leases or assignment applications, applicants on new 40 acre leases must stand the cost of fencing the field,

Easement Programs

Gary Roeder explained that, in 2011, easement program compensation rates were being based on a Geographic Area Rate Cap (GARC) and how those rates are established through a real estate area wide market analysis. **Gary** stated he would like some input from folks about the GARC rates as to whether the rates may be too high or low. An example on the table exhibit GARC rate for the Wetland Reserve Program was a \$5400 maximum rate for the FY 2011 in Churchill County. **Gary** explained that the easement programs are actually a way that the NRCS purchases and controls some property rights and uses through a specific program. The easement programs in Nevada include the Wetland Reserve Program (WRP), Grassland Reserve Program (GRP), and Farming and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP). **Dan Allen** stated that in the State of Nevada every county is required to do an annual market analysis of real property and provide that information to the State Tax Assessor. **Dan** wanted to know if the NRCS was utilizing that information when considering the GARC rates. **Gary** reported that he was not aware of that resource, but would access that information on-line and include it in the GARC variable calculations. **Gary** stated that he was new to the State of Nevada, but could see the potential easement program interest. **Gary** discussed the different website tools that are used in the ranking criteria for the easement programs and encouraged input from the Advisory Committee for screening easement applications based on state priorities, and wants to avoid any bias in the ranking criteria. **Bruce** reiterated that the Nevada NRCS easement programs are in the infancy stages of development, but that he was very happy with the work that had taken place so far. **Gary** discussed the need to find sources of State/Local and Non-governmental Organizations (NGO) for matching funds for FRPP easements, and that often the lack of matching funds is what prevented FRPP projects from going forward.

ACTION: **Gary** would like to establish an easement screening committee for FY 2012.

Proposed changes to Financial Assistance Fund Pools (Gary) VARIOUS ACTIONS

- **Development of screening criteria for applicants:**
Gary would like input from folks about developing screening criteria for program applications for FY 2012.
- **Split EQIP sage-grouse between private lands and public lands for tracking and data calls:**
Gary discussed the idea of separate funding pools for public and private land projects because there were privacy statutes on private lands that needed to be considered.
- **Group project requirements for cooperative contracts:**
Gary defined a Group Project as more than one land owner applying for separate funding on a project where each land owner benefits; and, defined a cooperative project as a shared project between individuals or groups collectively through an agreement.
- **Join irrigation system replacements with energy resource concerns:**
Gary discussed the idea of having a fund pool to refurbish old irrigation systems that no longer operate efficiently, especially with consideration to pumping stations. **Gary** wanted to explore the energy conservation benefit of such projects. **Ed Biggs** was concerned that some irrigation system updates would include conversions that could not be supported because the conveyance system demands, from a wheel line to a pivot irrigation system, would not be compatible. There was also discussion as to whether types of energy conservation could be stand alone practices. **Ed Biggs** cited the example of Irrigation Water Management Audits as a possible stand alone.
- **Wildfire prevention and/or rehabilitation:**

Gary asked for comment about a separate fund pool for wildfire prevention and felt that funding fire prevention was the biggest bang for the buck, fire prevention verses ecological restoration. **John McLain** wanted to know if funding for fire rehabilitation would apply for past fire areas, adding that some previously burned areas are now dealing with medusa head and cheatgrass.

- **Riparian area restoration:**

Gary asked whether or not there was any interest in having a separate fund pool for riparian area restoration projects.

- **Other comments:**

Gary requested feedback and input from the field offices and committee members by August 1, 2011 so that NRCS could begin considering how funding allocations may be prioritized; and, would like to consider how Nevada partners can assist NRCS with state resource concerns.

Cory Lytle felt that the August 1st date was too soon because the Local Work Groups (LWG) won't meet until this fall.

Doug Busselman questioned the idea of so many fund pools and felt that too many funds pools would take away from the ranking criteria and funding of the best projects for conservation.

Doug also questioned how "Hoop Houses" or the High Tunnel Initiative was a benefit to conservation.

Joe Sicking asked that we make a funding pool for noxious weed control.

Preparation for FY 2012 Conservation Innovative Grants

Paulette discussed the Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG), and said that, to date, no one had applied or been funded in the State of Nevada. A CIG project could be a pilot project or research, and applications must meet all of the same eligibility requirements as the EQIP applicants. Only 5% of the total Nevada NRCS programs allocation could be used or awarded to a CIG project, and a CIG project requirement must have a 50% matching fund or in-kind contribution to the project. CIG projects can be awarded at a national and local level. Examples of CIG projects that have been funded and more information about the program can be found on the National NRCS Web site:

<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/cig/index.html> or Grants Web site at www.grants.gov. **Gary Roeder** suggested folks review the last 2010 CIG projects awarded. He added that CIG awards cannot be used for funding project salaries, only for project implementation. The deadline for 2012 project proposal submission has not been announced yet, but most likely will be sometime this fall. **Doug Busselman** commented that the CIG award is a good opportunity for the Conservation Districts to seek project funding. **Connie Lee** requested that the CIG information be placed on the Nevada NRCS Web site. **Done:** <http://www.nv.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>.

Payment Schedule Development and Payment Rates

Mike Odegard, Albert Mulder, and Kristin Cuevas informed the committee about proposed changes to the 2012 payment schedule. **Kristin** stated the payment schedules were a work-in-progress.

Proposed changes discussed were:

- 110 Grazing Mgt. Plan, (Conservation Activity Plan)
- 320 Irrigation Canal Lateral, deleted for next year
- 329 Residue Mgt., deleted
- 338 Prescribed Burn, deleted because prescribed burns are overseen by NDF
- 380 Windbreaks, deleted
- 422 Hedgerow plantings, changed units from per acre to each
- 449 Irrigation Water Mgt., removed the 'intense' and 'non-intense' levels
- 466 Land Smoothing, deleted because of difficulty calculating yards of material removed
- 472 Removed?
- 484 Mulching for Erosion, removed erosion control for organics
- 511 Forest Harvest Mgt., deleted
- 512 Removed because the practice is used for AMA only
- 528 Herding component added to Standard

550 Range Planting, deleted Sage Grouse component and replaced with custom
 587 Structure for Water Control, changed units to drop inlet csf
 588 Cross Wind Ridges, deleted
 589 Deleted
 643 Deleted
 650 Deleted
 657 Practice units changed from square feet to each

Bruce asked for open discussion:

Caliente	James Gatzke, DC wants to keep the prescribed burn component in 338
Carson City	<p>John Christopherson asked who is qualified to write a forestry plan for an NRCS project. States he gets mixed messages about the Forestry Department's expertise to write plans.</p> <p>Birgit M. Widegren asked about coordinating with NRCS to implement 319(h) programs with NDEP. Bruce responded by indicating he would follow up on that item.</p>
EPA	Stephanie Wilson is interested in promoting more 319 project funding and possible MOU agreement with NRCS.
Fallon	Karl Anderson was concerned about utilizing residue management (329).
Las Vegas	Jarrod Edmunds agreed that it was important to get rid of practices not being used, but suggested keeping prescribed burning.
Yerington	Michelle Langsdorf feels there needs to be more NEPA functionality between BLM and NRCS.
Sparks	Matt Spaulding inquired about the possibility of NRCS having another Tribal Liaison in Nevada. Said that all of the tribes he works with ask this question.
Other Comments:	<p>There was request to line irrigation ditches with a material called "Razor Rock." Bruce stated there should be a decision coming from the CA-NV Engineers by July 1st regarding the use of the material and the standard. Land leveling, why don't we pay by the acre?</p> <p>There was some discussion about the monitoring of bio-solid application (septage) on farm fields and if that was regulated by the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection or NRCS for heavy metals.</p> <p>State technical committee would like more opportunity for input into the meeting agenda</p>

Next meeting: Fall 2011 Bruce would like to have another meeting in the fall, hopefully October or November.

Meeting agenda and attachments are available online at:
http://www.nv.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/stac_meetings.html.